



Aboriginal news from across Turtle Island and beyond
February 11-15, 2013

First Nations chief to ritually shame feds

[Toronto Sun](#)

February 10, 2013 10:48 AM EST

QMI Agency



A traditional native ceremony that has not been performed for decades will take place Sunday afternoon on the B.C. legislature lawn as a symbolic shaming of the federal government.

A copper — a metal plaque traditionally used to measure the status, wealth and power of Kwakwaka'wakw chiefs — will be broken by hereditary Chief Beau Dick.

"The copper is a symbol of justice, truth and balance, and to break one is a threat, a challenge and can be an insult," Dick [told the Victoria Times Colonist newspaper](#). "If you break copper on someone and shame them, there should be an apology."

On his [Facebook page](#), Dick wrote: "It has been scarcely 150 years since the proclamation of British Columbia. In this short period of time, the First Nations of this province have endured near annihilation and a cultural genocide unprecedented in the annals of human history.

"So, in the spirit of cultural preservation, my family and I will embark on a journey from our homelands on the northern tip of Vancouver Island to the legislature building of B.C. in Victoria. We will conduct a copper cutting ceremony, breaking the chains that bind us, freeing our hands so that we may create a better future for our children."

The 58-year-old master carver began walking with family members and supporters from his home in Alert Bay on Feb. 2. They have visited several communities, participated in traditional ceremonies, and met with elders and chiefs along the way.

An Idle No More rally is scheduled to start on the legislature lawn about one hour before the ceremony.

Aboriginal snowboarding team takes off: Extra-curricular program puts at-risk teens on a downhill slope

Canada.com

February 12, 2013 1:34 PM

Andrew Fleming, Contributing writer



*New members of the Aboriginal Snowboard Team get some last minute instruction before hitting the slopes at Cypress Mountain. **Photograph by:** Andrew Fleming, Vancouver Courier*

At the beginning of the January semester, a group of teenagers from different schools across the city gathered in a second floor classroom at Britannia secondary and were introduced to an exotic culture most of them knew little to nothing about.

The students weren't there to learn about the ancient Greeks, the feuding Montagues and Capulets or any of the other mainstays of Vancouver School Board high school curriculums.

Instead, they were there to learn about snowboarding.

The nearly 20 students are the latest members of the Aboriginal Snowboard Team, a 12-week program launched last year by volunteers who take at-risk youth up to Cypress Mountain and open the door to a healthy recreational pursuit and even a potential career path.

"We had 14 kids, seven boys and seven girls, apply last year and they were all at-risk kids and most of them had never even been to the North Shore mountains before," said Trent Gauthier, an aboriginal enhancement worker at Killarney secondary. "About a third of them were in alternate schools and a few of them were children in care of the ministry. Every single one of them finished the program and got their snowboarding coaching certificates, which is incredible because it is hard to get a hundred per cent completion rate on anything in schools."

The success rate is even more impressive given that, according to recent school board stats, fewer than a third of aboriginal students earn their Dogwood Diploma each year, compared to 82.5 per cent of non-aboriginal students.

Not only did they all graduate from the pilot project but many of them have come back again this year to help mentor other kids strapping on their first pair of boots and bindings.

Lacey Costucci-Phillips, a 16-year-old Gladstone secondary student, says she has fallen in love hard with the sport after a literally bumpy start last year.

"It was really hard at first and I wiped out a lot but it was probably one of the best things I've ever learned to do," she told the Courier. "I'm totally psyched to be back and help get other people into it. It's by far my favourite thing to do now."

The special after-school program, which operates without any direct funding from the VSB and relies entirely on donated time, transportation and equipment, was the brainchild of Renee Diemert, a Metis woman and former ski patroller who is now the school board's learning and development consultant for aboriginal education.

Diemert, who grew up skiing on Vancouver Island, says the sense of accomplishment that comes from mastering a challenging new sport has an immediate impact on other areas of students' lives.

"Snowboarding is something that takes courage and determination to do and you don't just pick it up right away," she said. "It's just so wonderful as a teacher to see the kids grow in their skills and their confidence every time we go up to the mountain. It gives them a real sense of pride that they can then bring back to school and feel they can now do things they might've thought they couldn't before."

Diemert has also arranged for students to participate in job-shadowing at Cypress, where they can be exposed to a variety of potential employment opportunities ranging from teaching to mountain operations, snow removal, retail and guest services. She hopes that students will eventually be able to earn school credits through the program as well.

It seems somehow fitting that First Nations members are nurturing a passion for snowboarding because, in a roundabout way, the sport owes much of its current popularity to aboriginal culture.

In the early days of snowboarding when most ski resorts didn't yet allow them, people often turned to using snowshoes in order to access backcountry terrain. This might never have happened if, untold centuries ago, North America's original

inhabitants hadn't first figured how to build special snowshoes to get around on top of the snow.

"I grew up spending as much time as I could in the mountains and it is great to be able to give these kids a chance to get out of the city and hopefully help them continue on and maintain a healthy lifestyle. It just opens up a whole new world for them," said Diemert.

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RCMP accused of rape in report on B.C. aboriginal women: Force takes claims 'very seriously,' but stresses complainants must come forward

[CBC News](#)

Feb 13, 2013 1:58 AM PT



RAW: RCMP reacts to human rights report 2:58

The RCMP says it wants to get to the bottom of abuse allegations against its officers in British Columbia involving aboriginal women and girls, but says individuals making the claims must come forward to allow police to conduct a proper investigation.

Those comments followed the release Wednesday of a report by New York-based Human Rights Watch detailing the claims — which include police threats, torture and sexual assault. The report calls on the federal government to launch a national inquiry.

Two researchers — one from Canada and one from the U.S. — spent five weeks last summer in the province's north, visiting 10 communities between Prince George to

Prince Rupert and hearing accounts from aboriginal women of alleged mistreatment at the hands of police.

[HIGHWAY OF TEARS A timeline of the 18 missing women cases in B.C.](#)

First Nations communities they visited are all linked to B.C.'s so-called "[Highway of Tears](#)," where 18 women have disappeared over the past several decades.

Meghan Rhoad, a U.S. researcher with Human Rights Watch, told reporters in Ottawa on Wednesday she is hopeful the RCMP will take the recommendations seriously.

"We met with the RCMP yesterday, and I am encouraged by the level of seriousness in how they are reviewing this report," Rhoad said.

RCMP Chief Supt. Janice Armstrong said in a statement released Wednesday the force is taking the allegations "very seriously," but added it needs more help to investigate further.



B.C.'s Highway 16 and a complex of routes linked to it have collectively come to be known as the Highway of Tears. (CBC)

"In a written response to a series of questions posed by Human Rights Watch in fall 2012, the RCMP emphasized the seriousness of allegations of police misconduct and that these allegations must be brought forward for proper investigation.

"We also explained that complaints could be made to the RCMP directly, to the Commission of Public Complaints

against the RCMP or to other independent investigative bodies without fear of retaliation."

The researchers interviewed 50 aboriginal women and girls, plus family members and service providers in northern B.C. They heard stories of police pepper-spraying and using Tasers on young aboriginal girls, and of women being strip-searched by male officers.

"It was very moving to sit across from these women and girls and hear them tell their stories," Rhoad told CBC News.

However, she told reporters that researchers found levels of fear among aboriginal women with negative stories about police "comparable to post-conflict situations, like post-war Iraq."

"We look to the police for protection, and our girls and women have not been able to trust them to protect them," said Sharon McIvor, who is with the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action and is a longtime advocate for aboriginal women.

"Not only are they not protecting them adequately, but they are perpetrating offences against them — criminal offences," she said.

"[The report] is not about painting all members of the RCMP as abusers," Rhoad said. "We know that the great majority of members serve honourably, devoting their lives to the protection of their communities.

"It is about the fact that those good officers deserve better than to see those tarnishing their reputation not be held accountable."

Woman claims life threatened

The report suggests some of the accounts of harm done to women and girls appear to be the result of poor policing tactics, over aggressive policing and insensitivity to victims.

Human Rights watch documented eight incidents of police physically assaulting or using "questionable" force against girls under 18.

The report also contains troubling and graphic allegations of physical and sexual abuse, including from a woman, identified as homeless, who describes how police took her outside of town and raped her.

Rhoad said the woman told her the officers then, "threatened that if I told anybody they would take me out to the mountains and kill me and make it look like an accident."

'Deeply fractured relationship'

Human Rights Watch said none of the complainants are named in the report because they feared retribution. The alleged perpetrators also are not named.

"What's important to know is that often the first response from the police to aboriginal girls is to treat them as criminals, whether they're calling for help, or whether they're just approached on the streets by police," said Annabel Webb, founder of the Vancouver group Justice for Girls.

Despite the RCMP's repeated requests, the group did not release the allegations to the Mounties until this week, CBC News has learned.

The disturbing report does bear some important disclaimers.

"Human Rights Watch does not contend that this information proves a pattern of routine systemic abuse," it says. "But when such incidents take place in the context of an already deeply fractured relationship with the police, they have a particularly harmful, negative impact."

The report also notes that, "the testimonies that Human Rights Watch gathered do not establish the prevalence of abuse."

Stories 'heart-wrenching, appalling'

The international human rights organization's report calls on the federal government to launch a national inquiry into the claims of abuse, and with the help of First

Nations leaders, implement a national action plan to address violence against aboriginal women and girls.

Human Rights Watch recommends the province hold a public inquiry, which could be part of a national commission of inquiry or a standalone inquiry.

Shawn Atleo, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, and Jody Wilson-Rayboud, AFN regional chief for B.C., are calling on both levels of government to implement the recommendations, with cooperation from indigenous communities.

"The stories shared in this report are heart-wrenching and absolutely appalling, particularly given this is only a small sample of the conditions and experiences of indigenous women, girls and families across our territories," Atleo said in a statement.

Full RCMP statement

The RCMP takes the allegations enclosed in the Human Rights Watch Report very seriously.

The unimaginable loss and pain felt by families and loved ones of missing and murdered persons is also felt across our communities. The RCMP looks forward to working with our government and non-government partners, as well the communities we serve to provide Canadians with the professional and accountable police service they expect and deserve.

In a written response to a series of questions posed by Human Rights Watch in fall 2012, the RCMP emphasized the seriousness of allegations of police misconduct and that these allegations must be brought forward for proper investigation. We also explained that complaints could be made to the RCMP directly, to the Commission of Public Complaints against the RCMP or to other independent investigative bodies without fear of retaliation.

Unfortunately, five months later and none of these allegations have been brought forward for investigation. It is impossible to deal with such public and serious complaints when we have no method to determine who the victims or the accused are.

British Columbians know and have seen that police officers are being held accountable for their actions and are being charged and even dismissed for clearly breaching their authorities and our expectations.

Since a final copy of the completed report was only provided to the RCMP on Tuesday February 12, 2013, we will need to take the necessary time to review it in its entirety in order to provide any additional information, facts or context.

Renal disease more prevalent and problematic for Aboriginal peoples

[Canadian Medical Association Journal](#)

February 14, 2013

Roger Collier



Aboriginal peoples from remote communities — such as Grise Fiord, Nunavut — tend to fare poorly following dialysis because they often live far away from treatment centres. Photo credit: ©2013 Thinkstock

Aboriginal peoples in Canada are far more likely to require treatment for kidney failure and end-stage renal disease than other Canadians, but don't fare as well following dialysis and have lower rates of kidney transplantation, according to a new report from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI).

Patients from the Aboriginal population who receive dialysis have a lower 5-year survival rate than the general population (40% vs. 45%). Those requiring a kidney transplant also trail the rest of Canada, by a wide margin, in actually receiving one (27% versus 42%).

In all, 2% of patients with chronic kidney disease develop end-stage renal disease, which has no cure. Aboriginal peoples, however, are nearly three times as likely as non-Aboriginal patients to receive treatment for end-stage renal disease. The main treatment options are dialysis or a kidney transplant.

The higher prevalence of end-stage renal disease among Aboriginal peoples is associated with higher rates of obesity and diabetes. Compared to other Canadians with the condition, patients from the Aboriginal community are more likely to be obese (40% vs. 27%) and to have diabetes (49% vs. 27%), according to the report, *End-Stage Renal Disease Among Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: Treatment and Outcomes*.

One of the primary reasons Aboriginal patients with end-stage renal disease fare poorly following dialysis is that they often live far away from treatment centres. About one in five has to travel more than 250 km. And since treatment is sometimes required multiple times a week, for several hours at a time, this can affect employment, as well as make it difficult to have the support of family or friends.

There are also several barriers to organ transplantation in Aboriginal communities, including a lack of education resources about the procedure and cultural beliefs that frown upon the practice.

Diabetes too has a negative impact on treatment options, particularly for transplants, says Sushma Mathur, manager of the Canadian Population Health Initiative at CIHI.

Patients with diabetes are more likely to experience postoperative complications, as are donors who have diabetes. "There are a whole range of emotional and psychological factors that would also need to be considered," says Mathur.

Proposed interventions to improve the kidney health of Aboriginal peoples include bringing more health services to the community, training health care workers on culturally appropriate practices and erasing geographical barriers through technology such as telehealth.

"We also found that community involvement in the planning of prevention and treatment services was shown to improve outcomes," says Mathur.

In the future, CIHI hopes to have access to data on specific populations — First Nations, Métis and Inuit — within the Aboriginal community.

"We know that there are clinical and treatment differences for these specific populations," says Mathur. "In the future, it would be great if our data systems could be a bit more sophisticated so that we can actually report on each of the groups within the Aboriginal population in Canada."

Human Rights Watch blasts Harper as Tories back aboriginal women committee

[Global News](#)

February 14, 2013 6:48 PM

Mike Blanchfield, Jim Bronskill and Steve Rennie



Laurie Odjick, back left, whose daughter Maisy has been missing since 2008, and NDP MP Niki Ashton, back right, look on as Bridget Tolley speaks during a press conference on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Thursday Feb. 14, 2013 calling on the government to hold a national inquiry for missing Aboriginal women. Tolley's mother was struck and killed by a Quebec police cruiser on the Kitigan Zibi reserve in 2001. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Sean Kilpatrick

OTTAWA - The human-rights watchdog that documented allegations of police abuse against aboriginal women in British Columbia is taking Prime Minister Stephen Harper to task for telling victims to just "get on" with reporting the abuse.

Samer Muscati, a Canadian researcher who was involved in compiling the report released Wednesday, said Harper missed the whole point — that aboriginal women and girls are often too traumatized to co-operate with police.

"Those comments ignore the fear of reprisal those victims have," Muscati told The Canadian Press in an interview Thursday.

"The comments don't address the core issue of the lack of security that prevents indigenous women and girls from filing complaints of police abuse."

The report, from a New York group called Human Rights Watch, accuses RCMP officers of abusing aboriginal women and girls in northern B.C., and also includes an allegation of rape.

The alleged incidents were uncovered as part of a broader investigation into charges of systemic neglect of missing and murdered aboriginal women along B.C.'s Highway 16, nicknamed the "Highway of Tears."

Harper said the government has asked the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP to look into the allegations, but he urged those connected with the report to simply come forward and tell police their story.

"If Human Rights Watch, the Liberal party or anyone else is aware of serious allegations involving criminal activity, they should give that information to the appropriate police so that they can investigate it," he told the House of Commons on Wednesday.

"Just get on and do it."

In an interview, RCMP Commissioner Bob Paulson said the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP is well-placed to conduct an impartial probe of the allegations.

"The CPC, for goodness sakes, is an independent, arm's-length body that would investigate those things. So I find it very troubling that we're unable to advance on that."

Paulson said senior force members in British Columbia met with Human Rights Watch staff earlier this week and will do so again Friday.

"We tried to get them to understand that there is a public interest in having these handled by the justice system."

Muscati said Human Rights Watch tried to brief Harper and three members of cabinet — Public Safety Minister Vic Toews, Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Duncan and Public Works Minister Rona Ambrose — in advance of the report's release, but they were rebuffed.

Ambrose is also the minister of state for the status of women.

The RCMP commissioner took exception to the human rights organization likening the aboriginal women who came forward to people victimized by brutal Middle Eastern regimes.

"We disagree on their assessment that we're Libya or Syria in terms of having people afraid (of) retribution," Paulson said.

"I think the systems are clearly present to reassure people.

"There's no evidence to conclude that a complainant would be at risk from making a complaint against a police officer."

But Paulson stressed that investigators need basic facts to begin a probe.

"We should hear where and who and how. And then let's go investigate. If it's not us, another professional police agency or an independent office of investigation or the (complaints commission)."

Paulson said he wasn't trying to cast doubt on claims heard by the human rights organization.

"I'm not skeptical. I am concerned that we are entering a new arena of anonymous, concealed criticism and demands for accountability."

Muscatti said the group has no intention of sharing the information it has about the abuse, as it has been urged to do.

"We have to stand by the victims who have asked us not to identify them because they're terrified of police retaliation," he said.

"It's missing the point of the report. If he met with us and reviewed the report, he would know that's an unrealistic request given that our report is about fear and insecurity that plagues aboriginal women and girls."

The core recommendation of the report is that the federal and B.C. governments participate in a national commission of inquiry into the matter — a measure endorsed by the NDP, Liberals, the Green party and the Assembly of First Nations.

Human Rights Watch undertook the investigation last year after Justice for Girls, a Vancouver-based agency approached, it in 2011 complaining that authorities in Canada were not doing enough to address the problem.

Annabel Webb, the founder of the group, which works with poor, troubled teens, said Harper's comments show he is "out of touch" with the suffering of aboriginal women and girls.

"Because to suggest the women and girls should go back to the very complaint mechanism that we're saying is an utter failure is ridiculous," Webb said.

"He's not acknowledging the level of fear that the women and girls are facing, and he's not listening to the criticism that we need independent oversight of the police."

Human Rights Watch will continue to press the matter, said Muscatti.

"It's obviously an issue that we're going to keep working on. It's one that has caught the attention of the public," he said.

"It's not going to go away. It's something that he's going to have to address at some point."

The Conservative government said Thursday it will support the idea of forming a special parliamentary committee to study missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada.

Such a committee "could focus on practical solutions for the future, so that generations to come will no longer have to face the risks faced by those of the past and of today," said Conservative MP Kerry-Lynne Findlay.

It would also explore the "broader underlying causes" of contributing issues in areas like family violence, economic security and prosperity, education, health, policing and urban living, she added.

A national public inquiry, however, is the only way to get justice for the women and their families, said NDP MP Niki Ashton, the party's status of women critic.

"What the families of the victims that have lost a sister, a daughter, a grandmother have said is they want a national public inquiry," Ashton said during question period.

"An independent investigation is needed to get to these answers."

Josh Paterson, the head of the B.C. Civil Liberties Association, said he isn't convinced a parliamentary committee is the best avenue to study the plight of missing and murdered Aboriginal women.

"A parliamentary committee is not, by nature, independent from the political process. All of the parliamentary committees have got majorities from the governing party, and there are partisan people all around the table," Paterson said.

"This isn't something that should be left to political or partisan gamesmanship."

He spoke by telephone from Vancouver, where he was participating in a march along with several other hundred protesters in honour of missing and murdered aboriginal women.

Nor is Paterson confident in the RCMP commission's ability to investigate the allegations contained in the report.

"We have found, and so many people have found over the years, that it is a very ineffective way of getting complaints dealt with," he said.

"So we don't take that particularly seriously."

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